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ABSTRACT

This packet provides the concerned teacher and supervisor with materials for learning how to determine the percentage of time their students are actively engaged on task. The materials include definitions of key terms, a list of situations during which students must be considered unengaged, sample forms to be used in classroom observations of students, procedures to be used during classroom observations (including instructions for filling out the forms), a checklist of methods for improving time spent on task and student engagement rates, and a list of reference materials. (Author/PGD)

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USING TIME-ON-TASK TO SUPERVISE AND IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Researchers during the last six years have produced a wealth of knowledge that has practical value for increasing student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and the managerial competency of teachers. These findings have limited value unless they are interpreted and synthesized into procedures and instruments that can be used by instructional supervisors. This has resulted! Methods and materials are available for use by supervisors of student-teachers, principals, and curriculum supervisors in assisting teachers to become more effective. These materials and procedures will be shared with the participants.

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in discussing time-on-task

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USING TIME-ON-TASK TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

Research, during recent years, has provided educators with numerous characteristics of effective teachers. But we continue to largely disregard these findings by using unproven traits as the basis for training, supervising, and evaluating teachers.

One variable which research has proven to be characteristic of effective teachers is that of time-on-task. It has been concluded by most that effective teachers directly emphasize academic activities and devote more class time to academic skills. John Goodlad, in his new book A Place Called School, calls the readers' attention to some schools being unaware "that time is virtually the most precious learning resource they have at their disposal." He further states that "School-to-school differences in using time create inequities in opportunity to learn."

The amount of time students spend on worthy tasks is not only related to their gains in achievement, it is also a determining factor in the teacher's ability to manage the classroom -- a prerequisite for successfully implementing most all pedagogical skills and methods. Accepting these statements as truths, it becomes imperative that teachers be conscious of their engagement rates (percentage of time a class is on task), offered suggestions for improvement and thus, become more effective.

This packet provides the concerned teacher and supervisor with the few materials necessary for learning how to determine engagement rates. With a little practice, a teacher can train a colleague and the two can then become a symbiotic team. They

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can visit each other's classroom, make recordings of the student behavior, determine the engagement rate, and finally discuss ways for improving students' time on worthy tasks.

Before presenting the individual items in this packet, one needs to realize that there is no specific engagement rate (ER) that separates effectiveness from ineffectiveness. The objective of this procedure is to increase the time-on-worthy-task while maintaining a pleasant learning environment. We do not want our children in a classroom with an ER of 100%, but we also don't want our children in rooms with rates of 40%. As teachers, we should be concerned if our engagement rate is under 65% and we should try to improve to an ER of 80-85%. Remember: the objective is to improve our effectiveness so that students' achievement will improve, there is no "right" engagement rate, and different types of classes and instructional goals may, and should, influence the engagement rates (ER).

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TERMS

ALLOCATED TIME: The time allocated to the teaching of a particular subject.

ENGAGED TIME: That portion of the allocated time during which the child is actually working or paying attention.

ENGAGEMENT RATE: Percent of assigned students who are actively participating in the assigned work.

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UNENGAGED CATEGORIES

MANAGEMENT/TRANSITION

1. distributing
2. setting up
3. gathering equipment and materials
4. "in-between" activities
5. taking roll, cleaning up, standing in line
6. listening to nonacademic directions
7. waiting for teacher's help
8. turning through pages in book
9. if teacher's directions do not contain content and is not a disciplining act, then place the act in this category
10. student listening to the teacher read answers without explaining
11. rummaging in desk and sharpening pencil, waiting at teacher's desk and with hand raised

SOCIALIZING

1. socially interacting
2. note passing
3. laughing, whispering, talking

DISCIPLINING

1. adult reprimanding a student
2. student being punished
3. student watching other student being scolded
4. head down on desk for punishment

UNOCCUPIED/OBSERVING

1. student is classified as unoccupied/observing only if he can not be classified in one of the other unengaged categories
2. sitting or standing alone
3. wandering about with no evident purpose
4. playing with materials
5. staring out the window

OUT OF ROOM

1. temporarily out of room
2. errand
3. bathroom

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TIME-ON-TASK DATA

Date: _____
Teacher: _____
Coder: _____
School: _____
Class: _____
Level: _____

Time:
Students assigned:
Pull-outs:
on subject:
on other assigned activity:

Engaged:
Management/transition:
Socializing:
Discipline:
Unoccupied/observing:
Out of room:

Time:
Students assigned:
Pull-outs:

on subject:
on other assigned activity:

Engaged:
Management/transition:
Socializing:
Discipline:
Unoccupied/observing:
Out of room:

Time:
Students assigned:
Pull-outs:

on subject:
on other assigned activity:

Engaged:
Management/transition:
Socializing:
Discipline:
Unoccupied/observing:
Out of room:

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ENGAGEMENT RATE FORM

Date: _____
Teacher: _____
Coder: _____
School: _____
Class: _____

TIME	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
ASSIGNED						
ENGAGED						
MANAGEMENT/ TRANSITION						
SOCIALIZING						
DISCIPLINE						
UNOCCUPIED/ OBSERVING						
OUT OF ROOM						

Calculate the engagement rate for the class by dividing the Total Number of Students Engaged by the Total Number of Students Assigned.

$$\text{Engagement Rate} = \frac{\text{Total Students Engaged}}{\text{Total Students Assigned}} = ___$$

Other Observations:

Suggestions:

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PROCEDURES

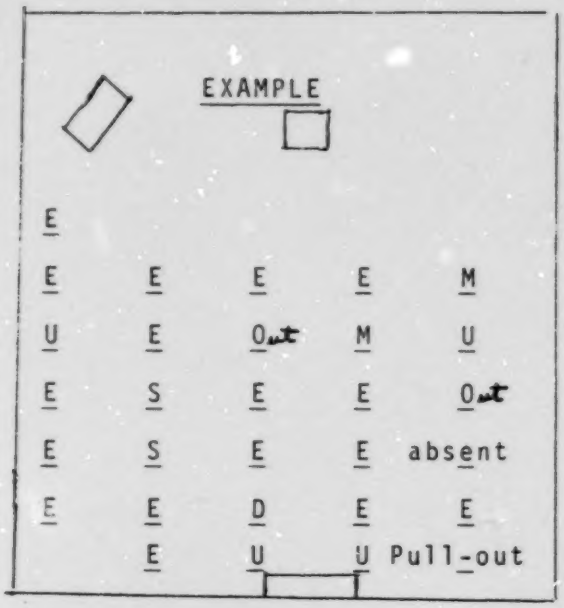
- ☐ The observer/coder should make an initial visit to the classroom for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the room's design, becoming familiar with the teacher's lesson plan for the upcoming observation period, and for determining the best place from which to observe.

- ☐ The observer and teacher should plan on a minimum of two or three observation visits. Multiple visits will provide a better overview of the teacher's use of instructional time.

- ☐ The observer/coder will determine how frequently she/he will code the behavior of each student and the time of the first coding. This may be established as every 5 minutes, every 10 minutes, or some time in between. The initial coding is pre-determined and each coding thereafter is commenced on time. This strictness of procedure is to keep the observer/coder from consciously or unconsciously selecting the best or worse time for coding.

- ☐ Assigned students will be observed as either engaged or unengaged. If unengaged, the first letter of the appropriate category of each unengaged student is recorded.

- ☐ The "Observation Form".



Time:	10:10
Students assigned:	28
Pull-outs:	1
# on subject:	28
# on other assigned activity:	0
Engaged:	17
Management/transition:	2
Socializing:	2
Discipline:	1
Unoccupied/observing:	4
Out of room:	2

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☐ An explanation of the above entries:

Time:	10:10	(Time of first coding.)
Students Assigned	28	(Number of students present for instruction.)
Pull-outs	1	(Students pulled out of this class for remedial instruction, gifted class, etc.)
# on subject:	28	(Number assigned to the subject being taught.)
# on other assigned activity:	0	(If some students are assigned to work on another subject during the coding time, they are so noted. Example: faster students may finish their reading and go on to their math.)
Engaged:	17	(At the prescribed time, the coder in a set sequence observes what each student is doing. If a student is working on the assigned task, she is recorded as "E" (engaged).
Management/transition	2	If the student is not engaged, then
Socializing:	2	she/he is identified as to the type
Discipline:	1	of unengaged behavior. Refer back
Unoccupied/observing	4	to page 4 where these categories
Out of room:	2	and examples were first presented.

The box on the form represents the floor plan and the lines represent the seats of students who are present. When coding, the observer quickly makes a judgement whether a child is engaged and if so records an "E: on the student's seat (line).

If the student is unengaged, the observer determines to which of the five unengaged categories the student's behavior belongs. The appropriate letter is placed on each line for unengaged students — M/T, S, D, U, or O.

☐ The "Engagement Rate Form: The data collected from each of the observations are accumulated on this form.

Example:

Time	1 10:10	2 10:18	3 10:26	Total
Assigned	28	29		57
Engaged	17	19		36
Management/ Transition	2	0		2
Socializing	2	1		3
Discipline	1	2		3
Unoccupied/ Observing	4	5		9
Out of Room	2	2		4

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☐ Calculating the Engagement Rate (ER).

$$ER = \frac{\text{Total Students Engaged}}{\text{Total Students Assigned}} \quad \frac{36}{57} = .63$$

As mentioned in the introductory pages of this packet, there is no one ER that separates the effective teacher from the ineffective teacher, but the percentage provides a guage for analyzing the amount of time that students are working on assigned tasks. The data on the Engagement Rate Form also provides an overview of the types of behaviors that students are participating in when unengaged.

Once the teacher decides to increase the ER/time-on-task of students, a source of concrete suggestions should be available to her/him. A sampling of approaches for increasing time-on-task follows.

One last thought! It is a most worthy instructional situation when teachers have engagement rates between .65-.85, but for students to be on un-worthy instructional tasks is an unpardonable act which largely negates the existence of a high engagement rate (ER). Time is a precious and costly commodity that is not to be wasted—especially on unworthy tasks.

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APPROACHES FOR INCREASING TIME-ON-TASK AND ENGAGEMENT RATE

_____Randomly call on reciters to keep children more attentive and on task.

_____Don't have reciters perform in a predetermined sequence of turns.

_____Signal the class that someone else may be called on if the reciter makes a mistake.

_____Have materials ready so that your planning and preparation are not the causes of students being off task.

_____Be certain that each student has the necessary materials to follow the reader.

_____Have all students perform in unison.

_____Require the remainder of the class to read silently while one child reads aloud.

_____While some students are performing a task at the chalkboard, require the others to do the same task in a workbook or on a ditto sheet.

_____Use small, individual chalkboards for each student to record and show her work.

_____To keep attention use new, novel, and/or varied relevant materials and methods.

_____Plan for and provide appropriate activities for the early finishers and the "nothing-to-do" students.

_____More frequent shifts of activities as opposed to long periods of just listening, copying, or completing multiple worksheets.

_____Try not to interfere with children's assigned tasks. (Ex. announcements over PA, giving additional directions which should have been given earlier, being over emotional and loud in correcting behavior, irrelevant talk, etc.)

_____Circulate and check work/products - keep students accountable.

_____Don't spend too much time helping one student while losing the remainder of the class.

_____Attempt to not disturb the whole class in the process of correcting one student's behavior.

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Check-List (cont.)

_____When correcting a student, consider giving only a simple reprimand instead of a nagging sermon.

_____Plan and structure the day where unnecessary time is not lost because of: poor directions, materials not readily accessible, procedures, traffic jams, handing in materials, etc.

_____Structure the transitions between instructional activities where there is less off-task behaviors.

_____Realize that long periods of student talk (recitation) result in off-task behavior by other class members.

_____Consider the time that students spend waiting on the teacher, lining up to exit and enter room, lining up and waiting to enter lunch room, etc.

_____Realize that students frequently leaving their seats to obtain materials are highly susceptible to distractions and tend to be off-task more.

_____Realize that being overly concerned with students' opinions and allowing students to work on individualized assignments without teacher supervision usually result in a lesser amount of academic engaged time.

_____Discuss with your principal how/if:

_____Interruptions can be reduced.

_____PA announcements can be reduced.

_____To eliminate inappropriate assemblies.

_____Parents could collect lunch/milk monies.

_____Students could go to the restroom on their own.

_____Less time can be spent waiting to enter the lunch room.

_____Pull-outs' transition time could be reduced and possibly scheduled for a less critical time or schedule all of a teacher's pull-outs only during the same subject period (remedial reading during reading).

_____Consider the time spent having a student redo work he can already do.

_____Realize that for some students 15 minutes of reading instructions is enough while others may need an hour.

_____Realize that busywork types of duplicating sheets may keep students occupied but not to be a worthy "on-task".

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_____Consider integrating or combining subjects into multipurpose lessons. For example, have students write a science report or read an account of an historical event.

_____Consider teaming up where one teacher teaches one level of reading to the whole group while other teachers teach other levels—thus a more appropriate use of instructional time.

_____Consider shortening or adhering more closely to the time allotted for recess, milk breaks, assemblies, lunch, etc.

_____Is a change in your management needed? Are early finishers and socializing students pulling others off-task?

_____Consider having slower students complete their work during free time or as homework so that other students don't have to wait.

_____Provide alternative assignments to be completed in order to reduce the time students spend waiting for help. Consider the use of peer tutors.

_____Increase teacher-student academic interactions. Ask students more questions.

_____Move around the room regularly and systematically to insure on-task behavior.

_____Make certain that expectations are clearly stated in behavioral terms. Be consistent in holding students accountable.

_____Communicate high expectations for all students and hold students accountable.

_____Require participation by all students in all group activities.

_____Provide for prerequisite learning needed for a particular task.

_____Consider the time spent on non-academic tasks. (Ex. constructing Christmas wreath and making May Day baskets in the 6th grade.)

_____Circulate among students to answer questions instead of having students come to the teacher's desk.

_____Have standards for achievement that are high, yet reasonable.

_____Give extra tasks/assignments in advance so the students will stay engaged in academic work after they have finished their first assignment.

_____Consistently hold students accountable for their work.

____Provide a more structured learning environment for students with low pretest scores.

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